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Editor's Introduction

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Editor's Introduction

THIS issue marks a transition for the Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies. After many years of service, **Katherine C. Zubko** will be retiring from being the Journal's book review editor. Her untiring service, professional expertise and caring hand will be sorely missed by the Journal's editorial board, the Society for Hindu-Christian Studies and the readers of this Journal. We are very grateful for Katherine's steady and invaluable contribution to this Journal.

The JHCS welcomes its new book review editor, **Daniel J. Soars**. Daniel completed his PhD in Comparative Theology at the University of Cambridge in 2019. His thesis, entitled "Beyond the Dualism of Creature and Creator," is a Hindu-Christian comparative enquiry into the distinctive relation between the world and God, with a particular focus on the work of Sara Grant and the earlier Calcutta School and their attempts to bring Thomism into conversation with Advaita Vedānta. Soars teaches at the Divinity Department at Eton College.

Three articles presented in this volume are expansions of the papers delivered at a panel at the annual meeting of the Society for Hindu-Christian Studies in November of 2018. The main purpose of that panel was to discuss the appearance of a new book *To Be Cared For: The Power of Conversion and Foreignness of Belonging in an Indian Slum* (University of California Press, 2016) by Nathaniel Roberts. The book has been well received in scholarly circles and it was the cause of a lively discussion at our own meeting.

In the first paper, **Eliza Kent** focuses on Roberts' argument that the religiosity of urban Tamil Dalits, or "slum religion," transcends Hindu or Christian affiliation. Roberts' ethnography challenges

the dominant discourse surrounding Pentecostal Christianity which asserts that conversion is inevitably divisive, splitting families and communities and even individuals in harmful ways that justify its tight legal regulation. To the contrary, Roberts' fieldwork reveals how the deeply pragmatic nature of Dalit religion allows for significant individual variation and dynamism without inordinate contentiousness.

The second paper, by **Sarbeswar Sahoo**, examines Roberts' contribution to the anthropology of Christianity in India. Roberts' book has four aspects: first, it provides a nuanced *contextual* understanding of the pluralities of Indian Christianities; second, it questions the hierarchy of the religious world and how materiality or worldly benefits occupy a central role in the life-world of believers; third, it discusses pastoral innovation and shows how Pentecostal pastors innovate new ways of interpreting doctrines to address the everyday social problems of believers, and also how pastoral innovation needs to be understood in the context of pastoral competition and rivalry; and finally, it discusses a notion of belonging that goes beyond territoriality and religious affiliation and shows how relationality, shared values, and real/imagined connections are essential to belonging. In light of these four aspects, Sahoo argues that by discussing the moral problems and cultural contradictions that surround the everyday life and world of low caste Dalit Pentecostals in a slum in Chennai, Roberts provides a rich ethnography of caste, Christianity and care in India.

In the third paper, **Nathaniel Roberts** responds to Sarbeshwar Sahoo, and Eliza Kent. He attempts to address some of the questions, challenges and insights they have put forth in

their comments on *To Be Cared For*. He focuses on their methodological questions and how he justifies his own epistemological stance in relation to those he studies and challenges in his book. He does so by highlighting a basic distinction between ethnographic studies, which take religion itself as object of investigation, and an anthropological study, in which religion is approached as an aspect of social reality.

The fourth paper, by **Nadya Pohran**, draws us from anthropology back to ethnography and literary analysis. Bhakti (loving devotion) centred on and directed to Jesus Christ—what Pohran calls "Christ-centred bhakti"—is an increasingly popular religious practice in India and elsewhere. Her paper seeks to explore the roots of some contemporary spiritual bhakti poetry in India, and how Christ-centred bhakti can be situated within bhakti's broader historical contexts and literary expressions. Pohran highlights some of the expressions of Christ-centred bhakti by focusing specifically on one bhajan, 'Man Mera,' and reading it alongside bhajans by the 16th-century Rajasthani poet-saint Mirabai. She focuses on Christ-centred bhakti documents and demonstrates some of the ways in which bhakti is being practiced with Christian idioms and in Christian contexts. And, significantly, her paper illuminates various ways that some Christians grapple with their faith in Jesus and embrace an existential uncertainty regarding their sense of God.

In the fifth paper, **Andrew Unsworth** provides a historical and textual analysis of the document 'Ad Extremas', an encyclical epistle issued by Pope Leo XIII, that gives rare insights into the official opinion of the Catholic Church regarding India's indigenous religious traditions at the close of the nineteenth century. This essay offers a critical

assessment of its contents and a better appreciation of the ecclesial transition that occurred between the pontificate of Leo XIII and the promulgation of those texts of the Second Vatican Council that referred to Hinduism.

In the sixth paper, "On Śrīla Prabhupāda's insistence that "'Christ' came from 'Krishna,'" **Ronald Huggins** examines ISKCON founder A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda's claim that the name *Christ* was derived from *Krishna*. Prabhupāda frequently appealed to this derivation as a way of encouraging his largely Western Christian audience to participate in the Vaishnava practice of *kirtana*. Huggins article explores (1) the place this etymological claim played in Prabhupāda's thinking and missionary strategy, (2) how he came to defend it, and (3) how his defence fits into the ongoing East/West discussion of the alleged etymological interdependence of *Christ* and *Krishna* that has been going on since the 18th century.

The final paper, by **Daniel J. Soars**, focuses on a small section in the epilogue of Francis X. Clooney's *The Future of Hindu-Christian Studies* in which he outlines some of the personal characteristics needed to do comparative theology well. He takes five of these from Catherine Cornille's *The Impossibility of Interreligious Dialogue* and adds several of his own. By exploring notions like doctrinal humility and rootedness in a particular tradition, Soars further reflects upon the 'virtues' of the discipline in both senses of the word – not only those attributes required to engage in it, but the merits of doing it at all.

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